

26 JULY 1975

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Postal Inspector Named in Cover-Up

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

The man who stopped the CIA from tampering with the mails, it is now alleged, actually helped the CIA cover up the illegal operation and misled Congress in the bargain.

He is William Cotter, the chief postal inspector, who first began dealing with the Post Office in the 1950s as a CIA agent opening other people's mail.

After he was put in charge of enforcing the postal laws in 1969, he allegedly promised a CIA officer that he wouldn't interfere with the illegal mail openings without first consulting the CIA.

True to his promise, he never told his postal superiors about the mail-opening project. But when the heat was on, Cotter asked the CIA to clear the operation with his postal bosses. The CIA refused, so Cotter belatedly stopped the mail openings to save his own skin.

These charges have been made by Rep. Charles H. Wilson (D-Calif.) in a private letter to Postmaster General Benjamin F. Bailar. Wilson, whose subcommittee has been investigating the mail-opening scandal, asked Bailar to fire Cotter.

In calling for Cotter's removal, Wilson charged that "his dedication is first and foremost to the CIA, not the Postal Service."

Cotter also misinformed Congress, according to Wilson, about his knowledge of the mail openings. The chief inspector swore he had "no official awareness" of the mail surveillance since he left the CIA project in December, 1955. "The Rockefeller report reveals that this assertion is false," Wilson wrote.

He told the Postmaster Gen-

eral bluntly that "the contradictions in Mr. Cotter's testimony should be of some concern to you."

Wilson noted that Cotter continued to conceal the mail openings even after he had received inquiries "from American scientists." Not until 1973, nearly four years after he became the chief inspector, did he halt the illegal operation.

Cotter is on vacation and could not be reached for comment.

Footnote: Cotter is now pursuing a marginal mail-opening case with uncharacteristic zeal. This involves a reporter, however, rather than the CIA.

Brian Kanzaki recently wrote in the Queens College, N.Y., newspaper that a student leader allegedly had used student funds to make personal, long-distance phone calls. The student leader charged that the story was based on phone records illegally obtained from her mail.

She called in the postal inspectors, who threatened Kanzaki with prosecution if he didn't tell them where he got the phone records. These are the same inspectors who ignored the opening of millions of letters by the CIA.